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Instant Amnesia. — When President Carter made his absurd claim that the botched rescue mission had somehow made the situation of our hostages in Iran "more manageable," it was a signal to everyone in the administration to play down the American captives' plight.

Bureaucrats at the State Department and other agencies eagerly took their cue from the White House, just as they did when the crisis was being played up for Carter's benefit in the primaries. Worse yet, the business-as-usual prescription was also swallowed obediently by members of Congress and their staffs.

Capitol Hill sources tell me the hostages have now become "passe" in Congress. As just one example, a key staff member of one congressional committee said he now spends a token few hours a week on the hostage situation, where he used to devote every working day to it.

Most shameful of all has been the complacent attitude of the press in sweeping the hostages' desperate plight under the rug. With few exceptions — notably Walter Cronkite's dogged nightly reminder of the Americans' lengthening captivity — the media have let Carter get away with his cynical manipulation of the hostage issue, just as it helped him hype the situation into a front-page crisis before the rescue-mission fiasco.

But one government agency has refused to forget the hostages. The Central Intelligence Agency's special task force on Iran has, if anything, been working longer hours than before on the situation. As turbulence grows in Iran, a typical day for the CIA staffers is anywhere from 12 to 14 hours.

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